



Photos by Senior Airman Melanie Bobair

Above, Lt. Col. Michael “Mo” Beale, 69th Fighter Squadron commander, conducts a preflight inspection on his F-16 Falcon. Prior to each flight the aircraft is thoroughly inspected by the pilot and crew chief.

Below, Capt. Chris Hutchins, 69th FS, reviews 8-mm infrared video tape after a mission. With the help of the tapes and other measuring and recording devices, the pilots can continually improve their accuracy and effectiveness in a real-world threat scenario.



Air Warrior teaches pilots air-to-ground support

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The 69th Fighter Squadron from Moody Air Force Base, Ga., is brushing up on its close-air-support techniques and joint warfighting skills by participating in its first Air Warrior exercise this year.

Air Warrior, a 14- to 17-day exercise, is designed to provide close-air-support training for fighter aircrews, command and control elements and Tactical Air Control Parties by leveraging airpower in support of Army forces in a realistic combat environment.

“This type of training is invaluable to my F-16 squadron,” said Lt. Col. Mark Picton, 69th FS operations officer. “If we don’t go out there and learn how to coordinate with the Army and clearly understand the fog of war, we will have a much more difficult time in combat. When there are tanks going against each other, that is not the time to experience the fog of war for the first time.”

Close-air-support is a secondary mission for the 69th FS. Its primary role is air interdiction, delivering precision-guided weapons as demonstrated in Desert Storm and both the Kosovo and Bosnia conflicts. Air Warrior provides one of the greatest opportunities for the unit to practice its secondary mission, said Col. Picton.

Mission breakdown

Typically, an exercise consists of both F-16s and A/OA-10s for close air support and command and control platforms such as the Joint Surveillance Targeting Attack Radar System and Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center. However, the 69th FS is the only squadron providing air support for this current exercise.

Army units out of Fort Irwin, Calif., formulate a decision based on prepared missions and communicate to the 549th Combat Training Squadron, here at Nellis, what type of air support and ordnance they desire for the battle, said Lt. Col. Joe Rehm, 549th CTS commander.

The 549th CTS staff then takes that information and builds an air tasking order. The intelligence staff takes this information and

assists in planning the visiting unit’s mission. Once in the area of operations at Fort Irwin, pilots communicate with deployed air liaison officers and TACP who guide them onto targets.

“The most challenging part of Air Warrior is the communication,” said Lt. Col. Michael Beale, 69th FS commander. “The picture when you’re airborne at 20,000 feet going 480 miles an hour is significantly different than the picture the person sees on the ground. The most difficult thing is translating what I see from the air to that person. Understanding what he sees and determining where we are going to put our bombs.”

Communication

“Close-air-support is heavily dependent on communications because attack pilots must clearly communicate with the ALO and TACP, who in turn communicate with the Army’s battle staff,” said Col. Rehm. “The 549th staff helps both the fighter squadron and TACP by keying in on these communications. After the battle, we conduct an extensive debrief to allow lessons learned to become evident to the pilots and the TACP/ALO.”

One key indicator of success is the avoidance of friendly fire incidents. The deployed unit’s goal is to avoid this type of incident at all costs. The units rely heavily on their communications with the Army to guide them to the right target. This goal is taken very seriously, said Col. Picton.

The 549th CTS staff does not evaluate the participants, but they do monitor the exercise/battle with high-tech equipment. The 549th CTS building is equipped with a measuring and debriefing system where the battle can be watched and heard electronically in real time. Real-time cameras are also strategically placed on the actual battlefield and can be viewed from the building as well.

Nellis supports 10 annual Air Warrior close-air-support training exercises making it the largest continuous joint training program in the Air Force. It provides operational control and logistical support for 36 deployed air units, training 2,500 people and flying more than 5,000 hours in joint operations at the United States Army National Training Center, Fort Irwin each year.

Right, Lt. Col. Jim “Krunch” Riess, 69th FS, inspects weapons prior to finalizing his preflight inspection.

Far right, Lt. Col. Michael “Mo” Beale and crew chief Senior Airman Kenneth Hutchinson, both with the 69th FS, complete one of the last preflight checklists before launch.

